UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

PROVISIONAL

A/47/PV.57
18 November 1992

ENGLISH

Forty-seventh session

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 57th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 5 November 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. GHAFOORZAI (Afghanistan)
(Vice-President)

- Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [79] (continued)

  (a) Report of the Conference

  (b) Report of the Secretary-General

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Ghafoorzai (Afghanistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10:45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 79 (continued)

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

(a) REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE (A/CONF.151/26. vols. I-IV and vol. II/Corr. 1)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/598 and Add. 1)

Mr. PASHOVSKI (Bulgaria): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio in June this year was unique in both scope and outcome. Its decisions mark an important milestone in mankind's perceptions for the future. The Conference broke new ground in multilateral decision-making, in public participation and in the active involvement of independent-sector organizations from all over the world. One of UNCED's most outstanding achievements was the broad-based commitment to global partnership, aimed at achieving human-centred, equitable and environmentally sustainable development. This commitment is reflected in a number of important international agreements and statements such as the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, the Statement on forest principles and the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity. These documents constitute important progress towards broad recognition of the need for global partnership in development and the environment. We commend their role as legally binding instruments for translating into practice the need to integrate environmental sustainability in the process of development.

The process started at Rio is daunting and challenging. Its success will depend to a large extent on the concrete follow-up steps aimed at practical implementation of the commitments and policies agreed upon at the Conference.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

We support the view that the implementation of Agenda 21 and other conclusions of the Conference should be based on an action- and result-oriented approach and should be consistent with the principles of universality, democracy, transparency, cost-effectiveness and accountability. The programme areas that constitute Agenda 21 are drawn up on the basis of further action, objectives and means of implementation. In this regard the present session of the General Assembly will have to decide on several important areas. No doubt one of the most important such areas is the question of the follow-up institutional arrangements.

My Government attaches particular importance to the agreement on the establishment of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission will play a central role in the UNCED follow-up process and will have an impact on the overall reform of the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields. We share the view that the Commission should be provided with a strong mandate and should assume a dynamic role in identifying priorities and emerging issues related to sustainable development.

The Commission should be constituted with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and should provide for the active involvement of organs, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system, international financial institutions and other relevant intergovernmental organizations. The participation of non-governmental organizations, including industry, business and scientific communities, should also be commended. In view of the gravity and magnitude of the environmental problems encountered by the countries in transition in the process of their economic reforms we hope that the Commission will pay due attention to these countries.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

With regard to the United Nations specialized agencies and other international organizations and financing institutions we share the view that these have to play an important role in implementing Agenda 21. In this connection we commend the strengthened role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in stimulating the environmental activities of the United Nations system.

Ensuring the necessary financial resources for the implementation of the commitments and programmes of Agenda 21 is one of the most important issues in the follow-up measures after UNCED. In this regard the need for mobilizing new and additional resources is generally recognized. Securing an operative link between all sources of finance for the Commission on Sustainable Development is therefore necessary in order to be able to meet the objectives outlined in chapter 33 of Agenda 21. In this context of financing, my country attaches particular importance to the Global Environment Facility, as one of the mechanisms in this field, and to its restructuring in accordance with Agenda 21.

Closely linked with the availability of financial resources is the question of the transfer of technology, cooperation and capacity-building. As a country undergoing a process of transition to a market economy and fundamental economic restructuring, Bulgaria is facing considerable difficulties in pursuing environmentally sound development owing to limited resources. This is why we are particularly interested in the encouragement of the transfer of technology within the framework of Agenda 21.

As outlined in chapter 38 of Agenda 21, national implementation and regional and subregional cooperation will be an important part of the outcome of UNCED. The regional commissions, regional development banks and regional

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

economic and technical cooperation organizations, within their respective agreed mandates, can contribute considerably in this process.

Bulgaria is satisfied with the prospects for promoting regional cooperation in Europe, and we are ready to take part in developing a comprehensive programme for the environment. We pledge our full support and active contribution to the protection of the River Danube and the Black Sea, and to promoting environmental cooperation with our neighbours.

Of special importance in this connection are the conclusions of the conference on the environment in Europe held in Czechoslovakia in June 1991. We reiterate our support and commitment to the principles and objectives set out in this document, as well as in the Declaration of the Ministers of the ECE Countries signed at the regional conference on the environment and development in Bergen, Norway. At the same time, we would like to pledge our firm commitment to the complete integration of Bulgaria in all European structures and mechanisms conducive to a more effective policy in environmental protection. In this regard we attach particular importance to our accession to the Council of Europe and to the ongoing negotiations for association with the European Community.

With regard to the environmental situation in my country, I would like to note that we are encountering serious difficulties. The Environmental Protection Act, adopted not long ago, is expected to become the basis for Bulgaria's environment policy. Regrettably, the country does not yet have a comprehensive national programme for environmental protection and reproduction. It does not possess a modern information system for monitoring the state of the environment, nor does it have a modern set of standards or economic regulators to stimulate the development of environmentally clean industries and technologies.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

The ongoing democratization of my country makes it possible to raise environmental issues freely and openly, and enables society to exert direct pressure on the institutions to deal with them. In this regard, the existing public movements and organizations are considered as a positive factor and their active involvement in the process is strongly supported. Notwithstanding the economic difficulties, the Government attaches great importance to all measures related to healing the country's environment. At the same time, the difficulties encountered in the process of transition greatly impede their effective solution.

Nevertheless, efforts are constantly being undertaken aimed at the fuller inclusion of environmental aspects in the process of restructuring the Bulgarian economy, which would make it easier to eliminate any possible negative consequences from the very beginning of this undertaking.

The development and formulation of an effective national policy in full awareness of modern tendencies in environmental protection is a necessary prerequisite for attaining steady, inflation-resistant economic growth. It is our conviction that these goals can be achieved with the introduction of market mechanisms, with appropriate economic and financial levers to stimulate the inclusion of environmental matters in the programmes and projects for economic development. Only in this way can industry provide stable economic growth and the necessary investment for meeting these standards.

In this sense, we believe that in the UNCED follow-up process more attention should be devoted to the environmental problems facing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which in many ways are in a worse environmental condition than many others.

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

As was made clear in the United Nations Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade and the Declaration on International Economic Cooperation adopted at the eighteenth special session of the General Assembly, the ongoing reforms and the restructuring of the economies of the Eastern European countries and their integration into the world economy could help greatly to strengthen the world economic system and invigorate world trade. This would also contribute to solving the grave environmental problems that these countries are facing at present.

In conclusion, I should like to state that my country is fully committed to the process begun at Rio. The Earth Summit has set new standards for environmentally sustainable and sound development. We ought to live up to these standards, and we must act now.

Mr. WLOSOWICZ (Poland): Allow me to thank, on behalf of my delegation, the Government of Brazil for hosting the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and congratulate it on the organization of this important event. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report and for the statement he made on Monday last. My thanks go also to the Rapporteur-General of the Conference, Mr. Brahimi, for a very substantial report.

The Rio Conference was based on the idea that the achievement of sustainable and equitable development remains the greatest challenge facing present generations. This was substantiated in turn by a growing concern about the environmental constraints of development. Questions on how these constraints might limit growth and on how growth could jeopardize the environment formed the basis of the search for new solutions. This search

(Mr. Wlosowicz, Poland)

helped establish a concept that acknowledges that economic growth and environmental protection are inextricably linked and that the quality of life depends on meeting basic human needs without destroying the environment, on which all life depends.

Many have asked whether the Conference was a success or a failure. It is too early to judge the results of the Conference itself, since it is only the implementation of the commitments agreed upon that will allow us to see to what extent the concept of sustainable development has been accepted as an operational category by the international community. But there is definitely an immediate result, which should not be underestimated: the growing environmental awareness among policy-makers as well as ordinary people throughout the world. The widely publicized results of the Rio Summit have proved effective in making people aware of the fact that their present lifestyles are dangerous for them and for their children.

Another achievement of the UNCED process is the so-called spirit of Rio: the spirit of compromise and the understanding that only collective action by all States, Governments, organizations and people can result in success, that is, in sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The representative of the Netherlands, Mr. Jan Pronk, stated in his address to the Second Committee that the spirit of Rio seemed to be fading away. This session of the General Assembly gives us a perfect opportunity to stop this trend by agreeing on specific and concrete measures for the full implementation of Agenda 21. Working out and implementing programmes and especially generating financial resources will require a real partnership

(Mr. Wlosowicz, Poland)

between all countries. But while there is strong agreement at the conceptual level on the need to integrate policies for development and the environment, there still remains a large gap between rhetoric and practice.

Policies will have to be built on the positive links between development and environment while countries - developed, developing or in transition - will have to make better use of the creative forces of entrepreneurship and enhance regulatory systems with clear enforcement rules, sound and transparent financial and legal systems, and efficient administration. A partnership between States means the opening up of and better accessibility to markets, transfer of appropriate technologies and provision of financial resources.

The belief that increased economic activity inevitably harms the environment is based on static assumptions about technology, consumption patterns and environmental investments. In reality, the relationship between overall economic activity and the environment is continually changing. New technologies are needed to promote growth while using energy and other resources more efficiently and reducing pollution and waste.

At this session the General Assembly has an important task ahead of it: to establish a structure for monitoring the implementation of the Rio commitments. Thus, we hope that the creation of a Commission on Sustainable Development will enable us to undertake this endeavour successfully. The Commission should not be yet another subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council devoted to long discussions on procedural matters, but an effective and efficient body ready to take decisions, set out policy guidelines and deal with questions of financial resources.

Meeting at the ministerial level will definitely help the Commission to reach the necessary decisions. The Commission must be open to new forms of

(Mr. Wlosowicz, Poland)

proceedings, including a special role to be played by non-governmental organizations and international financial institutions. In the light of the crucial role of the non-governmental organizations in giving the subject of the environment such priority on the international agenda, effective procedures enabling them to participate fully in the work of the Commission seem of particular significance. The Commission will have to be served by a small but skilled and competent secretariat, led by a high-ranking official.

The successful conclusion of the negotiations on the two important Conventions signed in Rio - the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on biological diversity - is a clear indication of the growing awareness of the international community in dealing with those problems.

Poland hopes that the ratification processes will soon be completed. A number of technical questions still remain to be solved. One of these is an extension of the mandate of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee until the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Climate Change is held. We hope that an appropriate decision can be taken at the current session of the General Assembly.

We also hope that the Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of all Types of Forests, signed in Rio, will develop into a convention aiming at the creation of a framework for global cooperation in preserving this crucial element of the ecosystem.

The Rio Summit, as an expression of a universal set of values, also has proved to be of particular importance to the countries in transition. We appreciate the international community's recognition of the problems of this

(Mr. Wlosowicz, Poland)

group of countries. This understanding finds concrete expression in the chapter devoted to financial resources. We should like to state very clearly that Poland wishes to cooperate with all the countries of the world in the area of sustainable development. In particular, there is plenty of room to strengthen the cooperation between my country and the developing countries in the area of exchange of technology.

(Mr. Wlosowicz, Poland)

Poland finds itself at a crucial moment in its economic development. It is necessary to make this development sustainable. After over 40 years of constant environmental degradation, leaving many regions of the country in a state of ecological disaster, the Polish authorities are incorporating principles of sustainability into their policy programmes. The main ecological threats consist of air pollution, soil and forest degradation, saline water and solid wastes. Most of them, because of their transboundary dimension, require very close regional cooperation on the part of the international community as a whole.

Investment in protection systems and the introduction of clean technologies in Poland will have a beneficial effect on the state of the environment in neighbouring countries.

May I underline that, in this connection, Poland hopes for a broad application of debt-for-nature swaps.

My country is in the process of formulating specific policies with a view to implementing Agenda 21. The Government intends to establish a multisectoral committee to monitor our environmental policy. A national secretariat for the Convention on Climate Change has already been established in order to study specific programmes aimed at reduction in gas emissions. A country report is in the process of preparation. The Conventions agreed upon in Rio have not yet been ratified, owing to the requirements of parliamentary procedure, but we expect this process to be completed in 1993.

In order to make the development of our planet sustainable, a tremendous effort on the part of the entire international community - of every State, region and individual - is required. We hope that the United Nations will play a catalytic role in bringing those efforts together. We understand that

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only the common action of all members of the present generation can save terra nostra for those yet to be born.

Mr. BURAVKIN (Belarus) (interpretation from Russian): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus proposes to approve in principle the report and the results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the report of the Secretary-General and, in particular, most of the recommendations on the establishment and future activity of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as other decisions and recommendations adopted at the Earth Summit.

We are by no means inclined to overestimate the importance of agreements reached in Rio, but we note with satisfaction that, for the first time in world history, the problem of attaining sustainable development has moved out of the range of specific scholarly interests to become one of the most important long-term political priorities and practical actions of the world community. Moreover, it is being treated within the context of basic human rights. For the first time, the world community was most poignantly confronted with the choice between the conventional "practical" politics, aimed at achieving immediate benefits, and the politics of deliberate compromise and sacrifice in the name of the survival of mankind.

Having had the bitter experience of one of the biggest technogenic disasters of the twentieth century - the Chernobyl disaster - the Republic of Belarus will work further in the international arena to ensure that the choice is made in favour of the well-being of our common home - the Earth.

This is why, at all stages of preparation and the holding of UNCED, we tried to make a positive contribution to its successful outcome. For this reason, Mr. Stanislav Shushkevich, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus,

(Mr. Buravkin, Belarus)

confirmed at the Rio Summit in the adherence of our country to the obligations undertaken, as well as our adherence to the Conventions and agreements in this sphere previously signed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Republic of Belarus attaches exclusive importance to its full-scale involvement in global cooperation for achieving sustainable development, and regards the implementation of Agenda 21 on the basis of the principles of the Rio Declaration as the long-term objective of our domestic and foreign policy. We declare our firm intention duly to contribute to the creation of necessary conditions and to the working out of mechanisms for implementation of the plan of action outlined in principle at UNCED. We made this statement at the Helsinki Summit, held on 12 and 13 June 1992, as well as in the general debate at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

In the sphere of inter-State relations we can single out some priority directions in this connection.

First, within the world community, and primarily in the United Nations system, we think it extremely important to prevent pitting the countries in transition in Eastern and Central Europe and those of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) against the developing countries, with regard to international aid and special technical assistance from the developed industrial States. Rigid, one-sided positions here do not seem to be productive. Life teaches us to take multifaceted, unconventional approaches. Thus, while having the status of a recipient country in the framework of United Nations Development Programme technical assistance, in certain areas Belarus is itself capable of offering aid and assistance to the developing countries, for example, in environmental planning, education and training of experts.

(Mr. Buravkin, Belarus)

Secondly, in our opinion, there exists an urgent need to intensify and better coordinate activity of the European regional environmental security structures as the prerequisites for sustainable development. One possible example of such activity in this sphere is the preparation of the Environment in Europe 1993 report, carried out under the aegis of the European Communities and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, as well as the implementation of the Environment Programme for all of Europe. The forthcoming meeting of ministers of environment of the European States in Switzerland in early 1993 may, and should, play a significant part in working out the post-Rio strategy. It would be expedient to formalize the principles of European cooperation in order to ensure environmental security on the continent in the European Environmental Charter.

Thirdly, the Republic of Belarus is paying special attention to the coordination of activity of environmental agencies within the CIS. The first session of the Inter-State Environmental Council, which took place in Minsk in July 1992, has laid the organizational and other foundations for voluntary interaction of the CIS in the sphere of ecology and environmental protection in the context of the results of the Rio Conference.

(Mr. Buravkin, Belarus)

Fourthly, non-governmental organizations, with their significant intellectual and organizational capacity, continue to make an important contribution to the definition and implementation of the concept of sustainable development. We regard them as energetic partners in tackling common problems; we highly appreciate their efforts and their work and hope that this cooperation will continue to grow. We are pleased that it was in the capital of Belarus that an international youth conference on the theme "Our environment, our responsibility" was held last August in the context of preparations for the 1995 establishment of the United Nations of Youth. That conference supported the main achievements of Rio and called on all youth organizations world wide to involve themselves in the implementation of Agenda 21.

Finally, we saw the second Global Environmental Investment Conference, which took place on 20 and 21 October this year at New York's World Trade Center, as an example of the new partnership in a market-oriented world. The United Nations and the World Bank, along with non-governmental organizations and representatives of international business, science and finance were among its organizers and participants. Belarus set out before the conference its priority technical projects, whose successful completion would, in our view, enable us to make our own contribution to the more ecologically balanced future urged in Agenda 21.

Today the people of Belarus are accomplishing a task of great historical importance: the creation of a demilitarized market economy conforming to the concept of environmentally sound sustainable development, on the basis of the

(Mr. Buravkin, Belarus)

experience of the world community and with the use of new technologies and the highest internationally accepted environmental standards. But the need to make extraordinary efforts to stabilize the situation in our Republic, in these initial stages of the democratic reform of our economic and political life, is severely impeding the implementation of existing plans to mitigate our "traditional" national environmental problems and the transboundary consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

As a young sovereign State, the Republic of Belarus is experiencing significant political, economic, social and environmental hardships. On the one hand, we have a fairly well-developed, multi-sector industrial and agricultural complex. But on the other hand, our economy is largely based on technologies that consume huge amounts of natural resources and harm the environment. As much as 45 million tonnes of waste a year accumulates in our Republic; the majority of this waste is not processed, but simply dumped. Stationary and moving sources pollute the atmosphere with about 3 million tonnes of harmful substances. About 10 per cent of industrial and domestic sewage gets into our surface-water reservoirs without being adequately purified.

The environmental situation in the Republic has sharply deteriorated since the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which occurred on the territory of neighbouring Ukraine, at the very border with our country. As members know, Belarus suffered the most from this disaster of unprecedented scale. This is an example of the very complex and interlinked nature of the problems of environmental, military, political and economic security in modern

(Mr. Buravkin, Belarus)

society. These can be solved only in an integrated way, which is precisely why consistent implementation of our Republic's neutrality and non-nuclear status, the reduction of defence spending and the conversion of military industries are now vital parts of and conditions for the implementation of our national programme to ensure environmental security.

Two years have passed since the Supreme Soviet of Belarus proclaimed the territory of the Republic an environmental disaster area. Yet the situation in the area of health remains critical, particularly with respect to care of mothers and children and to supplies of medicines, even though the Government is now devoting all possible State energy and resources to dealing with these problems. A quarter of our country's annual budget goes to mitigate the effects of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Government of the Republic of Belarus has a clear strategy for the rational use of natural resources and the improvement of the environment. We are adopting new legislation on the protection of nature, and introducing economical ways of managing, utilizing and protecting the environment. Work has begun on a system of environmental monitoring. We are certainly not standing idle.

But at the same time we think we could solve our environmental problems much more quickly with more active support from the world community. Radical improvements in the environmental situation in our Republic and in our region can be achieved only through technological restructuring of existing industries, oriented not towards increased production but first and foremost towards ensuring environmentally safe and clean production: "soft" industrial

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development. In that connection, we greatly appreciate initiatives along the lines of the decision of the British Government to host a 1993 conference on the transfer of technology.

Referring to the grief of our native land, the head of our Parliament said at the Earth Summit that the nation of Belarus had always been deeply compassionate and sensitive to the pain of others. He said that our tragic and bloody history had taught us to understand and sympathize with the problems of others as though they were our own.

That is why the Republic of Belarus declares its full support for the future Commission on Sustainable Development as an expression of our willingness to contribute to the implementation of the decisions adopted at Rio. We wish to participate in its work as a Commission member, and ask the delegations of all States Members of the United Nations to support our candidacy.

I wish to conclude by stating that Belarus supports the proposed adoption at this session of resolutions on the outcome of Rio, on the comprehensive evaluation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and on the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of an intergovernmental committee to draft an international convention on desertification.

Mr. LANGON (Uruguay) (interpretation from Spanish): In June 1992, at the Rio de Janeiro Summit, the President of the Republic, Mr. Luis Alberto Lacalle Herrera, announced Uruguay's intention to prepare a set of guidelines for the drafting of an international environment code as a means of contributing to the further development and implementation of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The guidelines were prepared by a special committee of experts appointed for the purpose. Bearing in mind that environmental issues, among others, cannot be approached in a partial or territorial way, we have the honour to submit these guidelines to the Assembly. They will be distributed as a General Assembly document, which we hope will form the basis for the future development of international legislation that must accompany the implementation of Agenda 21.

Uruguay considers that the effective implementation of Agenda 21 depends on the availability of essential financial resources and the transfer of technology to developing countries on preferential terms. In this respect we fully support the statement of the Chairman of the Group of 77.

We assign equal priority to strengthening and developing the legal commitments assumed in Rio de Janeiro by the countries participating in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The concern expressed by the Foreign Minister of Uruguay during the general debate, on 1 October of this year, over the fact that the Rio Conference did not end with the adoption of more concrete and effective documents, and the risk that the principles set forth in the Declaration and Plan of Action agreed in Agenda 21 would remain only good intentions without

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

real and effective application, is what moved us to present these guidelines for the future prepartion of an international environment code. That code should be seen in the same light as the Conventions already signed on biodiversity and climate changes, which Uruguay will ratify shortly.

Indeed, as our Foreign Minister stated in this Hall,

"Governments will have to agree to transform into legally binding obligations the principles of conduct, liability and compensation emanating from the Stockholm Declaration and later endorsed and developed in the Rio Declaration, which are considerably more than moral obligations. While today they are obligations stemming from international ordinary law, they are, moreover, authentic criteria embodied in jus cogens, and are valid erga omnes." (A/47/PV.21, p. 76)

My country is actively preparing a national environmental code that will embrace even more enthusiastically, from an environmental point of view, the principles embodied in these guidelines that we are today submitting to the Assembly for consideration.

Hence the sensitivity of our President when he announced, in his statement at the Rio Conference, Uruguay's determination to propose, as we are now doing, the codification of these principles on a world-wide scale in a legally binding instrument.

On the other hand, as was said by our Permanent Representative to the United Nations in his statement on agenda item 10, concerning the "Agenda for peace" submitted by the Secretary-General, the end of the cold war has opened up new possibilities for realizing the ideals that inspired the creation of the United Nations, which represent the basic principles of our international

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

life, including, inter alia, respect for the principle of sovereignty and the legal equality of States, the principle of non-intervention, the right to self-determination and respect for the promotion of human rights to the fullest extent.

The issue of the environment fits perfectly into the concept of an integrated approach referred to in the Secretary-General's "Agenda for peace", to the extent that sustainable development is inconceivable unless it takes into account the environmental point of view and the management of natural resources.

Moreover, were development not sustainable, were natural resources and the environment as a whole not respected, mankind would be jeopardizing the precious objectives of both security and development.

An indispensible prerequisite for peace, security and development is the total preservation of the environment, which is not only the basis of a life worth living but also the foundation and sustenance of life itself.

In chapter 38 of Agenda 21 it is decided that, as a follow-up or monitoring mechanism, a Commission on Sustainable Development would be established. In our view, one of its main tasks would be the timely drafting and approval of an international environment code merging the scattered existing legislation, thus completing the institutional system within which the actions of all the nations of the world take place.

In complying with General Assembly resolution 44/228, nothing could be better than a code of this kind as an effective strategy to stop and reverse the effects of environmental degradation in the context of intensified national and international efforts to promote sustainable and ecologically rational development in all countries.

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

If, as is established in chapter 38.7 of Agenda 21, the general objective is the integration of environment and development issues at the national, subregional, regional and international levels, including institutional arrangements within the United Nations system, then doubtless the future codification of international environmental law, which the Uruguayan initiative seeks to attain, would mean a significant advance towards achievement of the objectives of sustainable development and peace.

One of the institutional arrangements referred to in chapter 37.3 of Agenda 21, and one of the recommendations of the Commission for Sustainable Development could make to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council is the adoption of an international environment code. It is our hope that the guidelines we are submitting today will be useful to their consideration by the international community.

Chapter 39 of this plan of action specifically provides for "the codification of international law for sustainable development", the negotiation of which should of course be conducted on a universal basis. Therefore this Uruguayan proposal should be taken as an exercise of our country's right to make suggestions with regard to what we consider to be the most appropriate ways to underpin sustainable development, as provided for in chapter 39.4 of the Rio document.

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

The Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay is perfectly well aware of the great difficulties to be overcome in the implementation of this project. We are living in a time of transition when the historical paradigm is changing. We are witnessing the radical transformation of world political and legal structures, the end of the philosophy of global confrontation, and the rise of the philosophy of universal solidarity based on recognition of the complete unity of the global ecosystem. This global ecosystem, or biosphere, is made up of a vast number of interdependent elements, which must act in harmony with each other, in accordance with the laws of nature that govern creation. This situation imposes a human ethos in which, apart from respect for these laws, solidarity is not a mere political option but a condition of survival. Without this harmonious, joint action, the effective and lasting viability of the global ecosystem, on which not only humanity but all living creatures depend, will become untenable and slide towards extinction.

A first glance at the draft before us shows that it incorporates all the basic principles adopted in Stockholm and Rio, and adopts an approach that is environmentalist and principled but at the same time realistic, allowing all countries to have a broad outlook regardless of their level of development, their political system or their philosophical orientation. The document contains a set of guidelines that, despite their clearly environmentalist intent and the detailed studies that led to the present text, are open to suggestions and changes, since we are aware that the participation of the rest of the international community can improve the guidelines and bring them into force in the not too distant future.

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

The draft guidelines contain a preamble and 13 chapters, with 82 articles in all, ranging from confirmation of the basic principles that should govern a code of this kind to provision for international organization systems, which should of course be harmonized with the existing structure in order to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the use of the resources that will be essential for the achievement of the proposed objectives.

We also wish to define precisely the rights and obligations of States and to establish the scope of international cooperation in the fields of trade and natural resources. We include chapters on such basic issues as environment and development, education, research and the transfer of technology. The very important issue of transboundary contamination is addressed in chapter 8, which contains specific provisions on publicity, conflict resolution and civil and criminal liability.

The guidelines, which seek to be exhaustive and to cover all environmental problems using a holistic approach, include provisions relative to various environmental issues and specific natural resources - that is, land use and soil preservation, biological diversity, ground cover, coastal areas and fishing, seas and water basins, wetlands and freshwaters, the global atmosphere, energy, debris, and climate.

That is a very brief summary of the draft guidelines for the preparation of an international environmental code that the delegation of Uruguay wishes to submit to the General Assembly for its consideration. We hope it will be a substantial contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and strengthened peace - so wisely and firmly proposed by the Secretary-General -

(Mr. Langon, Uruguay)

in accordance with the mandates of the community of nations, which looks forward with hope to the dawning of a new era of happiness and prosperity for the various peoples of the Earth, our common home.

Mr. AL-HADDAD (Yemen) (interpretation from Arabic): The international community's growing sense of responsibility with regard to the issues of the environment and development bespeak the political will to face up to the major challenge involved in preserving our "common house", the planet Earth. Nevertheless, we must admit that the threats to the ecosystem make it imperative to move on to a phase of collective action and to shoulder our international responsibility in a spirit of equitable commitment. Furthermore, the universality of the problem makes it necessary for us not to ignore the unbreakable link between the environment and development, in dealing with those threats.

The imbalance in the ecosystem has been caused by many and diverse factors that have polluted the Earth's waters, soil and atmosphere. While acknowledging that some of these factors arose from humanity's striving for prosperity, we must also recognize that other factors have been at play as a result of poverty and disease. Thus, we face a set of factors that, as a whole, are at the heart of national, regional and global problems that threaten the ecological balance and life on our planet.

Two decades after the Stockholm Conference, a historic opportunity has been afforded the international community in the form of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit.

(Mr. Al-Haddad, Yemen)

The adoption of the Rio Declaration, the Programme of Action, "Agenda 21", and the non-legally binding statement on the principles of an international consensus on the management, preservation and sustainable development of all types of forests amounts to an admission of collective responsibility vis-à-vis the common danger that threatens all the inhabitants of the same house, Earth, and the inescapable need for common action to save that house. Consequently, we must make use of this climate of enthusiasm in the course of the current period of transition wherein the parameters of the future world order are being defined in implementing measures that would enable us to face up to environmental dangers and to resolve the problems of development.

The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 contain a comprehensive set of concepts, goals and measures that would enable us to achieve the aims of the international community. In our view, the achievement of those aims requires concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels. In this context, the need for adopting innovative institutional arrangements is quite obvious.

Today, the United Nations is engaged in performing the tremendous task of facing up to the enormous challenge that confronts the international community. Our confidence in the Secretary-General has grown stronger. His two statements at the Earth Summit, the documents submitted to the General Assembly at this session and his excellent statement upon opening the debate on this agenda item include analyses and the proposals that would ensure the success of the efforts that will be made in the near future.

(Mr. Al-Haddad, Yemen)

In this context, balance and objectivity must be shown when we establish the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development in order to ensure the Commission's proper functioning and guarantee the coordination of the activities of United Nations bodies in the area of environment and development. Given the multiplicity of the tasks that will have to be carried out in this area, the developing countries should be given further support in developing and strengthening their infrastructures so that they may be able to contribute to environmental protection and to the development process. The spirit of Rio has highlighted the need for interdependence. Poverty, as the Prime Minister of Norway said, affects not only those who suffer from it, but also does harm to those who tolerate it and those who do not recognize that poverty is linked, among other things, to dangers to the environment.

My Government attaches special importance to matters relating to the environment and development. While strengthening the developmental pillars of our unified State, which has opted for democracy and pluralism even under crushing economic conditions, my Government has accorded the necessary priority to questions of the environment by passing a number of laws and regulations to protect it. More than 22 international conventions relating to the environment have been signed by Yemen. In the mid 1980s, the Council for Environmental Protection was established in order to support the Government's efforts in the elaboration of effective environmental policies. Several environmental and developmental subjects have been incorporated into university curricula. We cooperate with other States in the region in protecting the Red Sea coast and the Arabian Gulf against pollution. A plan to combat desertification has been drawn up. There has been an in-depth study aimed at elaborating a national demographic strategy. By the end of this

(Mr. Al-Haddad, Yemen)

year, a conference on environmental and water strategy will be held. Immediately after the Earth Summit, our Government instructed official and other bodies to give special priority to the stipulations of the conventions and documents which emanated from the Summit and to support the environmental-protection Council in order to allow it to carry out more effectively its activities in the area of protecting the environment.

Mrs. HASSAN (Egypt) (interpretation from Arabic): It gives me great pleasure to participate in this important discussion of the follow-up to the work of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). At the outset I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the institutional arrangements to follow up UNCED (A/47/598 and Add.1). His commitment and leadership will undoubtedly play an important role in the implementation of the conclusions of the Conference. I should also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Maurice Strong and his secretariat for the excellent planning and the massive deployment of all their experience in order to elaborate and provide the documents before us. In addition, I should like to express our sincere thanks to the people and Government of Brazil for the magnificent arrangements they made to receive us in Rio de Janeiro. Finally, my delegation would like to express its appreciation and gratitude for the excellent introduction to the report given by the Foreign Minister of Algeria in his capacity as Rapporteur-General of the Conference.

When the United Nations called for UNCED to be convened and for the recognition of the need to adopt an integrated and balanced approach to the questions of development and environment, a discussion of broad scope was initiated concerning the objectives of the Conference. The discussion had two

(Mrs. Hassan, Egypt)

sides, one supportive and the other questioning and criticizing. Despite this divergence of views, there was consensus on the need for the Conference to take place, due to the hopes people attached to it. The Conference succeeded, probably not as much as expected by its supporters, but undoubtedly more than was forecast by its critics. Its success might be attributable to the large scale and high level of participation, unprecedented in the history of multilateral diplomacy. These factors are in addititon to the important subject-matter of the discussions, which aimed at recasting the relationship between mankind and the environment and laying the bases to meet the development needs of present and future generations.

During the two decades that have passed since the Stockholm meeting it has become apparent that there is no adherence to the Stockholm Declaration in the face of continued risks resulting from various abuses of the environment. After two decades the international community became fully aware of this issue and decided to take a stand against all phenomena leading to environmental deterioration, to take steps to rectify past mistakes and to ensure commitment to a lifestyle that is more sustainable.

The Rio Conference, while building upon the firm foundations of Stockholm, added the "development dimension" to and made it a principal element that complemented the previous vision. Indeed, we consider this addition important and timely. It is the main achievement of the Rio Conference. It has now become obvious that we cannot deal with the problem of environmental deterioration without an integrated solution to the problems of development.

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In particular, we should find a solution to the problem of poverty, which is a crushing burden that contributes to the deterioration of the environment, deprives developing countries of the ability to meet the demands of their peoples who claim their natural right to development and prevents those countries from catching up with the accelerated pace of progress.

In addition to identifying problems and the means of resolving them, the Rio Conference also adopted principles and devised approaches that identify rights and obligations. The Rio Declaration, which my country fully supports, is a delicate compromise between various ideas and priorities. It lays down rules to be followed by all countries and peoples in their pursuit of sustainable development.

At the core of the Declaration is the recognition of the need to enable peoples to exercise the right to development so as equitably to meet the developmental and environmental requirements of present and future generations.

Agenda 21 is the product of a preparatory process at the technical level and negotiations at the highest political levels. It has elaborated, for the first time, an integrated framework for cooperation in the developmental and environmental fields at the national, regional and international levels. It aims at establishing global partnership for sustainable development in an interdependent world.

The Earth Summit also opened for signature two legally binding instruments, the framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Those two instruments represent an important addition to international environmental law. There were some misgivings that caused certain countries to voice reservations reflecting genuine concerns in relation to the Conventions. Those concerns must be taken into account in the

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future. Notwithstanding, we consider that the two Conventions are significant first steps towards dealing with two of the important phenomena that threaten our planet. Their true importance resides in the fact that they will lead to concrete steps and to the conclusion of special protocols with the aim of adopting measures of implementation, including the necessary financing.

The diplomatic achievements of the Rio Conference have paved the way to the development and restructuring of international relations on the basis of joint responsibility, although that may differ from one country to another. This entails a new perception of North-South relations that can lead to the full partnership to which we all aspire. It is now clear that the implementation of the Rio agreements can only be achieved through full partnership based on a new well-balanced and just economic and social world order.

No country, no matter how advanced its level of development and economic progress, can face the environmental challenge alone. Thus, new rules for North-South cooperation must be established through the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21. There is also a need to reactivate international cooperation for development and give it new impetus, steering it away from traditional methods so that effective participation may be achieved at all levels between Governments, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations as well as United Nations bodies and programmes.

The effects of global environmental problems transcend national boundaries and do not respect the North-South divide. Therefore, developing countries' ability to face up to those problems while they strive to achieve their development goals shall depend principally on the existence of a propitious international climate and a new partnership between developed

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and developing countries, that would enable the latter countries to integrate environment and development and thereby restore the global ecological balance. In our estimation, this calls for greater investment on the part of the developed North in the growth of the developing South.

Developing countries need to be able to rely on the necessary support and incentives in their striving to restructure their policies and rechannel their resources in line with the various programmes of Agenda 21. There is also a need for improved international exchanges, for better access to the markets of the industrialized countries by the products of the developing countries and for addressing the debt problem. The international community must also adopt a coherent system of effective transfer of resources.

At Rio, there was agreement to provide new resources for financing the implementation of Agenda 21. In our opinion, those resources must not be regarded as additional costs but as investments in global environmental security.

Agenda 21 contains a strengthened commitment to earmarking 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of the developed countries for official development assistance. It was also emphasized that there is a need for improved financing at predictable levels and for the optimum utilization of all financial mechanisms. The Conference also recommended restructuring the Global Environmental Facility and changing its working methods so as to expand the scope of its activities and give a more important role to developing countries in the process of decision-making. We look forward to making the changes agreed in Rio, at the next meeting of donor countries, which will be held in December, 1992, in Côte d'Ivoire.

(Mrs. Hassan, Egypt)

The question of providing the financial resources required for implementing the programmes of Agenda 21 will be the litmus test of commitment by the North to the goals set by the Conference and the North's readiness to translate the agreements into concrete commitments. This session of the General Assembly may be the appropriate forum for that.

In addition to the need for financial resources, there is a pressing need to encourage and finance private enterprise projects through the provision and transfer to developing countries of environmentally sound technologies on preferential terms. There is a need to provide capacity-building data, which should not be the monopoly of some countries, to developing countries, for without the means of implementation, the only avenue left to developing countries will be to redirect their programmes. This will encumber those countries with the additional burden of the environment in addition to the burden of restructuring. This the developing countries can ill afford.

The task before us equals and may be greater than that we had to undertake in the preparatory stage and at the Conference itself. The next stage will be decisive, for it will be in the course of that stage that the resolutions adopted at Rio will be implemented. The General Assembly should complete at this session what was begun in Rio, by taking note of the Declaration and Agenda 21 and starting the follow-up process.

(Mrs. Hassan, Egypt)

In this connection, we deem it important to establish at the earliest an intergovernmental negotiating committee to elaborate a convention on combating desertification, particularly in Africa. We hope that this matter will receive the same attention that was accorded to the Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity.

We deem it important also that the present session should take the necessary steps to hold a conference on sustainable development for small island countries.

We must emphasize the leading role of the United Nations in following up the conclusions of the Rio Conference. In this regard, the establishment of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development acquires special importance inasmuch as the Commission, by its nature and modus operandi, will be the appropriate framework for the management and follow-up of complementarity between development and environment with a view to achieving the sustainable development which would be enjoyed by all equally. In this respect, we re-emphasize our support for the position of the Group of 77 concerning the Commission on Sustainable Development.

To reiterate what we emphasized during the Rio Conference, Egypt calls for peace in our region; it is our conviction that the achievement of stability and progress at the national level is our main responsibility if we are to achieve stability at the regional and international levels. International security is an indivisible whole, and environmental security is a prerequisite of stability between the peoples of the region in which we live. Security is related not only to military matters but also to economic, political, social and environmental conditions, which together constitute an indivisible, integral whole. On this basis, Egypt played an active role in

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the preparatory process and in the Conference itself. We are committed to translating the resolutions adopted unanimously at Rio into national policies that must be implemented.

In this regard, I should like to mention that in order for it to face up to the dangers that beset us, Egypt has elaborated a comprehensive national environmental plan, on the basis of research and in-depth study by specialists in development and the environment. The plan reflects our national priorities, which include soil protection, extending the agricultural area, coping with the population explosion on a planned scientific basis, sound management of our water resources and the rationalization of their use and combating air pollution due to increased industrial activity. To these concerns must be added the protection of our natural resources and our national heritage: Egypt has the greatest historical record of any civilization, and we are committed to preserving it for all our generations.

Being a coastal State on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, Egypt is exposed to dangers that threaten the survival of the most densely populated and the most agriculturally and industrially rich areas. Pollution also potentially threatens our coasts, which are rich in coral reefs which came into being over millions of years. We give special attention to regional and international efforts to codify cooperation to combat marine pollution, and we are committed to implementing all existing plans designed to protect these seas. We are now discharging our obligations under the Mediterranean plan of action arising from the Barcelona Convention of 1976. We also support the Nicosia Charter of 1990 and the Cairo Declaration of 1992 concerning cooperation between Mediterranean and European countries for the protection of the Mediterranean environment.

(Mrs. Hassan, Egypt)

UNCED was an important step on the road towards sustainable development. The real test before us now is in the extent of the implementation of the agreements made at the Conference. A difficult road, full of challenges, lies ahead, and our success depends principally on the basic changes that we will undertake in order for the international community to rise to the level of the high ideals we hold in common. The spirit of Rio should guide our steps in the future. We must transcend the narrow dictates of self-interests which aim at short-term gains and promote instead a long-term political commitment to sustainable development which is threatened by over-industrialization and continued backwardness alike. As Mr. Brahimi said in his introduction, history will praise or condemn us according to whether or not we implement the conclusions agreed upon at the Conference. Future generations will have the full right to judge our efforts not by the quality of the documents adopted at Rio de Janeiro, but by what has really been achieved on the basis of the commitments undertaken there.

In conclusion, the momentum that began at Rio must not stop. We have been afforded a new opportunity to improve our common future by preserving our planet, achieving development and, consequently, ensuring justice and peace.

Mr. BIYARI (Saudi Arabia) (interpretation from Arabic): In considering the report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), my delegation would like to reiterate that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in the Rio Conference on the basis of our belief that it was extremely important to participate in international action to preserve the environment. Local laws of the Kingdom provide that State policy and programmes for development should be in consonance with the requirements of environmental protection. This is why our development plans for the

(Mr. Biyari, Saudi Arabia)

transport industry and mineral extraction include programmes and projects that will ensure such protection. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia uses the most modern techniques for extracting, storing and transporting all oil products so as to minimize the noxious effects and social costs of the oil industry in our Kingdom. By way of example, the oil extraction industry in Saudi Arabia controls the gases that result from oil extraction from the earth. Instead of burning them, we use those gases as fuel locally or export them abroad. We do this in support of a development policy based on the principles of environmental protection.

(Mr. Biyari, Saudi Arabia)

As for the refining industry, it applies the most advanced technologies in reducing oil-refining wastes and in enhancing the capability of protecting the environment. Despite the size of the oil industry, and its major contribution to the national income of the Kingdom, the implementation of environmental policies has contributed to promoting that industry without threatening the natural resources or damaging the environment.

In the area of agricultural development, the thrust of our programmes has been towards the reclamation and settlement of desert areas by modern means of efficient water resources management. Reservoirs and dams have been built to collect rainwater for the irrigation. Our ability to control flooding has resulted in the protection of the soil from erosion. Underground waters have been used extensively in reclaiming the desert, and our agricultural policy has focused on planting trees in the desert. This has contributed to lowering the temperature and thereby has created an environment favourable to the reproduction of animals and birds.

Due to the agricultural policy adopted by the Kingdom, food production has increased and is now sufficient to satisfy domestic needs and ensure a surplus for export. We have been able to support and promote production in the agricultural sector and at the same time improve the climate and the environment in our desert areas.

Regarding the question of development and the preservation of the environment, we have focused on protecting the environment from the negative effects of the wastes of transport and oil extraction. I should like to recall and underline the fact that the national policies of sovereign States cannot preserve the environment regardless of the policies of neighbouring States. The harmful effects of the Gulf War on the environment of Kuwait and

(Mr. Biyari, Saudi Arabia)

other countries of the region, as well as on the maritime and coastal areas, the atmosphere and the destruction of terrestrial ecosystems, together with the dangerous remnants of war require a concerted effort on the part of the international community to mitigate the negative impact of those factors on the environment of the region.

As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report A/47/265, the quantity of oil spilt in the Gulf has been estimated at between 6 and 8 million barrels. The most heavily affected marine area is along the Saudi coastline, particularly from the south of Khafgi, to the Island of Abu-Ali. A total of 600 kilometres of coastline including islands were severely damaged. One of the tragic results has been the death of at least 30,000 sea birds due to the saturation by oil of the seaweed they fed on. This was in addition to the material destruction of our coastline due to mines and barbed wire, and the destruction which was inflicted on the installations of the sewage network, which has led to the contamination of the Gulf water used for desalination.

As regards atmospheric pollution, resulting from the burning of the oil wells in Kuwait, effects of such pollution has been unprecedented in terms of health and material damage.

Since the end of the Gulf War, the Kingdom has carried out a large number of activities and done a great deal of work to limit the effects of that war on the environment. However, the environmental disaster created by the war far exceeds the means of a single State, and this is precisely why we trust that the efforts of the United Nations and the international community will continue to be deployed in mitigating the effects of the Gulf War so that the situation can revert back to normal and so that we may be able to revive our natural resources, which are so dear to mankind.

Mr. JAAKSON (Estonia): I am speaking today on behalf of Latvia, Lithuania and my own country, Estonia. I should like to thank the President and the entire UNCED leadership for the work that has been done to bring the UNCED process to this point. Under the President's direction, we shall now begin implementation of the Rio Conference ideals that have been so carefully discussed and planned. All three Baltic delegations look forward to the practical results that we trust will flow from the fine work that has been started under the President's guidance.

The Baltic States have participated, and are participating, in several planning processes for sustainable development in parallel with Agenda 21. On a subregional basis, the Baltic States have taken part in the work of the Helsinki Commission. On a regional basis, the Baltic States have been a part of the "Environment for Europe" process which will culminate in the adoption of a short-term action plan for Central and Eastern Europe and a comprehensive environment plan for the whole of Europe. Commissions have been formed in the Baltic States to make sure that the work of each intergovernmental group will be fully coordinated with efforts in each of our countries.

(Mr. Jaakson, Estonia)

The Baltic States have completed initial studies of their environmental problems, except in the areas currently controlled by the Russian Army. Because our access to Russian bases is limited and in some cases denied, our countries have not been able to assess fully the environmental effects of the Russian Army's continued presence. There are known cases of Russian troops vandalizing parts of their own bases, with unknown environmental consequences. Fifty years of occupation have left the Baltic States with a still-unknown legacy of environmental irresponsibility.

The Baltic States need further to analyse several important areas related to the environment before starting sustainable-development programming in those areas. Fishing and the straddling of migratory fish stocks in the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic Ocean require further long-term study. Integrated coastal-zone management is important to all three States and needs to be developed. Forestry management is of ongoing special concern. Each of these three areas is being treated as a natural resource and a natural reserve, a source of wealth that must be nurtured and not recklessly exploited.

Subregional and regional approaches to sustainable development have helped to begin to harmonize the sustainable-development standards used by the Baltic States with those of our neighbouring developed countries. Cooperation with developed countries on a regional basis has led Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to take a step forward in integrating their economies with developed economies while proceeding with the transition from centrally planned to market economies. Environmental protection and sustainable-development policies and activities are being measured by developed country standards, even though the means to implement those standards may not always be available yet in the Baltic States.

(Mr. Jaakson, Estonia)

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are well along in their analysis and planning processes regarding sustainable development. Any further work that needs to be done in the area of analysis and planning may now be done simultaneously with standards codification and strategy development. Future steps include legislated policies and governmental action regarding national compliance and enforcement of existing environmental conventions. Finding the means to implement these conventions is a priority for all three Governments. Sustainable-development reporting and controls need to be instituted by each Baltic State in its public and private sectors. The use of environmentally sound technology, especially in the areas of energy production and transportation, needs to be encouraged. Public education on, and participation in, sustainable-development projects need to be increased.

Most of the environmental problems that face the Baltic States are the result of outmoded manufacturing processes. Immediate, "quick-fix" solutions are needed for a number of energy plants, including the Ignalina nuclear power station in Lithuania and the Narva oil shale power station in Estonia. Controls must be immediately put into place while sustainable-development processes are implemented. Otherwise, the danger of irreversible accidents will persist, and clean-up could become a never-ending task.

It is to the credit of the entire UNCED process that Agenda 21 explicitly recognized the role of markets and competition between firms as the prime means through which sustainable development will be achieved. Recently privatized Baltic firms that used outmoded Soviet technology to produce outdated goods are being forced to recognize that their manufacturing processes and products must change. Unfortunately, modernization in the midst of a global recession will be a painful process that will lead to a drop of at

(Mr. Jaakson, Estonia)

least 25 per cent in the gross domestic product of each Baltic State in 1992. It is important to note that world-wide recognition of the importance of UNCED sustainable-development ideals and strategies comes at a critical time, just as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania begin to transform their economies.

Because public-sector financial resources throughout the world are under severe constraints, the Baltic States know they need to attract private-sector financing that will go only to environmentally sound firms and projects. The potential of "green" commercial lending and project finance is already acting as a guide to how Baltic firms internally structure themselves and their projects. Baltic firms are conducting comprehensive environmental audits and developing new business strategies to provide equity investors with environmentally acceptable projects. Compliance with sustainable-development standards is already being viewed as an opportunity and not a cost.

New models of public- and private-sector cooperation are evolving in the Baltic States as the concept of sustainable development becomes institutionalized. Tax and other fiscal incentives to encourage environmentally sound investment are becoming an increasingly important part of Baltic municipal finance policy. Research costs are being distributed between the public and private sector. The financial sector will inevitably become involved in analyzing, defining and monitoring the environmental risks inherent in any kind of development. While privatization takes place, ensuring sustainable development has become the responsibility of all sectors.

The preparation and accountability needed to implement the ideals of Cartagena, Agenda 21 and the Economic and Social Council summit have already begun from the ground up. The Rio Conference and the Global Forum for

(Mr. Jaakson, Estonia)

non-governmental organizations showed that people are concerned about sustainable development, and Governments must react. Agenda 21 has set a global standard against which people may judge the activities of their Governments.

The Baltic States are anxious to find ways of implementing the goals and standards of Agenda 21.

(Mr. Jaakson, Estonia)

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania support the establishment of a Commission on Sustainable Development and the changes outlined by the Secretary-General in his statement a few days ago. We know the responsibility for developing and monitoring the programmes that the Commission will address will still have to be shouldered nationally and regionally. We want to be sure that the efforts made by the Commission on Sustainable Development complement, and do not compete with, other initiatives. The Baltic States look forward to working in close cooperation with the new Commission.

Mr. BANGALI (Sierra Leone): Please allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his lucid and thought-provoking introductory statement on the report that we are now discussing, and to the Rapporteur-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, for preparing it. We also endorse the statement made by the delegation of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77.

The Conference in Rio was an epoch-making conference, coming at a time when we, on the crest of history, are watching the twilight of this century merge imperceptibly into the twenty-first century. The Conference represented a milestone in increasing mankind's awareness of the disastrous consequences of its behaviour on the environment. The clarion call that was made, particularly to the developed countries, to reduce the excesses of their lifestyles, does not seem to have been heeded. Also, the demand that was made of us in the developing countries to help stem the depletion of the world's natural resources is yet to be met. And so we ask the question: after Rio, what next?

(Mr. Bangali, Sierra Leone)

The answer or answers to this question are in that comprehensive programme of action that was unanimously adopted in Rio, that is, Agenda 21. Though the economic implications of Agenda 21 are immense, and may appear frightening to some, unless the programme is effectively implemented, for countries such as mine, which are categorized as least developed, the achievement of sustainable development will continue to be illusory, and therefore a dream.

What is of concern here to us is the implementation of this programme, especially at the national level. There is no gainsaying the fact that the global environment crisis that is upon us today has been aggravated by the severe economic and social deprivation that is prevalent in most countries of our developing world. The effect is an increase in poverty and our inability to discharge our rightful obligations. Poverty and deprivation do not make for meaningful sustainable development. Hence, there is the need for global partnership with the developed industrialized world, based on equity, which will require the provision of adequate resources for the implementation of Agenda 21. The development needs of developing countries have to be addressed, and these require additional funds. It is only with the provision of these much needed funds that we can talk seriously about sustainable development.

We in the developing world are equally committed to the implementation of Agenda 21. However, this will remain elusive without the necessary know-how, complemented by the availability of adequate financial resources. There is therefore a need for the transfer of environmentally sound and clean technology from the developed North to us in the South in order to promote economic growth and development. The technologies so transferred should be incorporated in existing socio-economic structures so as to enhance the

(Mr. Bangali, Sierra Leone)

capacity-building of developing countries. This, we believe, will ensure the attainment of some aspects of sustainable development.

Sierra Leone supports the principles on forests adopted in Rio last June, but as we said in our statement in the plenary meeting of the Conference, there is an urgent need for the provision of alternative sources of energy if we are to preserve our forests. We also stated in Rio that a villager in Sierra Leone who cuts firewood to cook his or her meal does not do so out of spite for the trees or forests. Since wood is their only source of energy, the fact of survival dictates, and even demands, that they cut down fuel wood if their food must be cooked. So, unless an alternative source of energy is provided for that villager, any promulgation of laws banning their getting firewood will be a wasted effort. This simple necessity of nature must be understood.

In Rio, Governments endorsed the need to establish and strengthen national systems, which should also measure the economic and social consequences of desertification. In view of the vulnerability of many countries, particularly in the African continent, to desertification, there is an urgent need to implement the recommendation in chapter 12 of Agenda 21 on halting the spread of deserts. We therefore urge that the work of the intergovernmental committee established by the General Assembly to draft an international convention to combat desertification, as endorsed by the Earth Summit, should commence as soon as possible. We hope that the fate that befell the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, adopted in 1977, will not befall the proposed convention.

My delegation endorses the establishment of a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development as a functional commission of the Economic and Social

(Mr. Bangali, Sierra Leone)

Council in order to ensure the effective follow-up of the Rio Conference. We share the views expressed by the Secretary-General and many delegations that membership of this Commission should not exceed 53, and that members should be elected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution. We are also of the view that the location of the Commission should be one that best meets the needs of all delegations of the United Nations, whether big or small.

Among the specific functions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, described in paragraphs 38.13 and 33.13 of the report of the Conference, is the consideration of periodic information provided by Governments regarding their activities in the implementation of Agenda 21. In such reporting, special support should be given to the least developed countries and small island States that face problems related to financial resources and the transfer of technology for sustainable development. Popular support is also needed for many of the activities endorsed in Agenda 21, and the role of women in promoting sustainable development should receive priority attention.

In addition to the views proposed for possible consideration at the first session of the Commission, identification of areas requiring urgent action could be included, in view of the exigent nature of deteriorating environmental conditions in many parts of the world. For example, in the eastern and southern parts of my country, Sierra Leone, massive ecological destruction has been taking place, owing to the senseless rebel activities of Charles Taylor and his marauding gangs of bandits.

(Mr. Bangali, Sierra Leone)

My delegation also welcomes the setting up of a high-level advisory group as part of the post-UNCED institutional arrangements. Members of the group should have demonstrated expertise not only in sectoral issues, but also in cross-sectoral issues such as international economics; poverty, its causes and its attendant consequences; demographic dynamics; consumption patterns; health; and decision-making on environmental matters.

We welcome the decision to convene the first global conference on the sustainable development of small island countries. We hope the conference will address the myriad problems those countries face as a result of their environmental vulnerability. We also look forward to the conference of African ministers of environment to be convened in Libreville, Gabon, in June 1993 as a follow-up to UNCED.

Mr. SONKO (Gambia): I wish on behalf of my delegation to thank the Secretary-General for his report and for the comprehensive statement he delivered at the beginning of this debate. Let me also thank the Rapporteur-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), His Excellency Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for his comprehensive report.

The historic Earth Summit in Rio can be qualified as a landmark in our efforts to synthesize our individual, national and international efforts and concerns to conserve nature. It brought into clear focus the international community's concern for environmental and development issues. We have now all recognized and accepted the need for a rational exploitation of nature's gifts to mankind. To transgress the limits is to undermine our very existence on

(Mr. Sonko, Gambia)

this planet. There is therefore a need for effective follow-up action on the decisions taken in Rio if we are to address the problems we have collectively identified and collectively pledged to resolve in the interest of our own survival and that of future generations.

My delegation is pleased to note that the Summit adopted meaningful programmes and projects designed to reinforce national environmental and development plans. The signing of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change represents a positive start in our various attempts to promote sound environmental management. The Gambia is hopeful that the climate Convention will eventually introduce stricter monitoring and control mechanisms, with definite limits on emissions of greenhouse gases. We hope we will be able to ratify these Conventions before the end of this year.

The implementation of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the plans and programmes adopted under Agenda 21 will not only promote sustainable development but also generate greater understanding and a more responsible attitude to the environment.

The Rio Summit also demonstrated the strong link between environment and development and the need to reassess and redress the imbalances in the world development order and their effects on the development of developing countries. In that connection, the attainment of the goals of sustainable development cannot be complete if poverty continues to plague us in the developing countries. In fact, poverty constitutes one of the most important impediments to sustainable development; it affects millions of people, particularly in the developing countries. It is therefore urgent to address this issue in all its forms.

(Mr. Sonko, Gambia)

The heavy debt burden; the lack of adequate food security, resulting in famine and malnutrition; weak and unsustained economic growth; and the lack of appreciable improvement in the living standard of the people: these too constitute major constraints in the effort of developing countries to promote sustainable development.

Africa continues to bear the brunt of the worsening world economic situation, with little sign of relief. During the last seven years the growth rate of the economies of African States has been, on average, less than 2.5 per cent per annum, while output in per capita terms continues to decline. This reduction in the overall performance of the economies of African States has been caused partly by the unsatisfactory trade situation, which is characterized, among other factors, by low commodity prices. This situation is exacerbated by rising unemployment and underemployment, a decline in the quality of social services and growing tension in society, associated with poverty, hunger and malnutrition. These factors of underdevelopment have to be addressed successfully if we are truly to embark on the road to sustainable development.

In addressing environmental and development issues at the Rio Conference, African countries proposed an international convention on drought and desertification to focus greater attention on our efforts to halt the widening destructive effects of this phenomenon in our countries, which results in the loss of productive land and livestock and the social destabilization of our regions. The available fertile and habitable land is no longer capable of supporting all its occupants. The need for a convention on drought and

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desertification is reinforced by the fact that during the last 20 years the world's forest cover has reduced in size, its deserts have widened and its topsoil has thinned. There are clear indications that African States have neither the technology nor the financial resources to cope with this problem, which affects a majority of States and which is exemplified by the current drought in southern Africa.

It should also be noted that drought and desertification contribute significantly to the loss of biodiversity. It is our belief therefore that a convention on drought and desertification would provide a framework for the implementation of appropriate long-term solutions and the provision of early-warning systems. We look forward to the early convening of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to ensure successful completion of its work by June 1994. It is, of course, clear that whilst the negotiations are in progress the necessary resources will be made available for the immediate implementation of the various programmes set out in chapter 12 of Agenda 21. In this regard, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee will need to maintain close contacts with the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development.

As we look back at the success of our work at UNCED, I should like to express my delegation's support for the projects and programmes adopted under Agenda 21 and our hope that adequate financial resources will be made available for their effective implementation. We also endorse the recommendations for the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility by expanding its areas of competence and its membership, as well as by making it

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more transparent. We call on donors to the Facility to increase their contribution levels during the next cycle of the fund so as to enhance its effectiveness as a financing mechanism. During the last meeting of the assembly of participants, it was agreed to include for funding by the Global Environment Facility issues of land degradation to the extent to which they relate to the four major global concerns. We welcome that decision, but hope that a restructured Facility will be able to include drought and desertification as a fifth item because of the gravity and complexity of this phenomenon and its overall impact on the global environment.

The high-level Commission on Sustainable Development to be established during this session of the General Assembly will serve as an effective organ in monitoring the implementation of the programme for sustainable development and environmental control.

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The Commmission will have to give high priority to cross-sectoral issues such as finance and financial flows; the transfer of technology; institutional issues, including those related to legal instruments and the Conventions; and capacity building. Effective and operationally meaningful integration in the Commission's work programme of the economic, social, technological, financial and entrepreneurial dimensions of sustainable human development that is participatory and people-centred will very much determine the overall impact of the Commission.

To give effective and meaningful support to the Commission, a similar high-level multidisciplinary body should be set up at the national level to advise and assist Governments in the effective implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level. Such an organ could assist in the preparation of national reports for the attention of the Commission and subsequently the General Assembly.

The work of these national organs should be supported by the regional institutions. To increase the competence of these national institutions, there is an urgent need to develop national capability to undertake implementation of Agenda 21, for sustainable development also implies the development of national and indigenous capability to formulate and implement development strategies that would ensure sustainability. In this regard it is encouraging to note that the United Nations Development Programme has put in place a programme known as Capacity 21. We look forward to the support it can give to our countries in the developing world.

In carrying out its commitment to environment and development, the Gambia has recently completed the formulation of an environmental action plan. We

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look forward to implementing the plan in close collaboration with, and with the support of, the international community in meeting the targets set by UNCED.

It is our fervent hope that our partners of the industrialized North will continue to share with us the desire to enhance, in a positive and meaningful manner, a just and peaceful world solidly anchored in the path of sustainable development. This will require greater resource mobilization both nationally and internationally, and a willingness to use these resources in support of the objectives of UNCED.

We will need to maintain and build on the unity of purpose that characterized the road to Rio. In the words of the Secretary General of UNCED, Mr. Maurice Strong,

> "Our essential unity as peoples of the Earth must transcend the differences and difficulties which still divide us. You are called upon to rise to your historic responsibility as custodians of the planet in taking the decisions here that will unite rich and poor, North, South, East and West in a new global partnership to ensure our common future." (A/CONF.151/20 (vol. IV), p. 55)

We should rededicate ourselves and our countries to the achievement of the objectives that took us to Rio. We will need to continue to work together as partners to ensure greater collective responsibility and action on environmental and developmental issues so that the world will be a better place to live in for all of us.

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX), of 22 November 1974, and resolution 43/177, of 15 December 1988, I now call upon the head of the Observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) (interpretation from Arabic): The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit was a significant event that is bound to have an outstanding effect on mankind's future in relation to sustainable development, that issue which acquires special importance in view of its impact on the options that are open to us for building a better future. Though the results of the Conference were not up to expectations, it did mark a beginning. The door is now open and there is now the possibility of building upon what has been agreed, so that the gravity of the problems and the need to urgently resolve them may be brought home to us all in a more balanced manner.

On behalf of my delegation, I should like to express our appreciation and thanks to Brazil for hosting the Conference so generously, and for all its outstanding efforts to make the Conference successful.

Holding the Earth Summit under the auspices of the United Nations, especially at this juncture, reflected the increasingly important role of this international body in resolving problems of a global nature. It also reflected the international community's increasing desire to strengthen the role of the United Nations. The intensive high-level attendance by the States of the world bespoke the importance of the Conference, as well as the ability of the United Nations to play an effective and fundamental role in this regard, given the political will of the Member States. We hope that the momentum that was generated in Rio will continue and enable us to complete what was started in Rio, here in the General Assembly, this year. The tasks before us are enormous and complex indeed.

The Rio Summit was convened in order to address these collective concerns: how is the Earth to support an ever-growing human population and

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provide for its ever-increasing consumption, with such finite resources? How can we safeguard the rights of future generations to inherit an Earth that can continue to provide for them? And, last but not least, how can we achieve a higher degree of equity for the present inhabitants of the Earth?

Mankind continues to progress, but the depletion of basic resources and the prevalent modalities of growth undermine efforts to preserve the environment, lead to the exhaustion of the Earth's riches and make it less capable of meeting humanity's increasing needs. The rampant pattern of consumption in industrial nations not only leads to privation in the case of the majority of the world's inhabitants, but also threatens the common future of all. That is why we hear so many voices raised with the call for a heightened world awareness that may lead to a reduction in the pattern of consumption in industrial nations, more equitable and adequate distribution of the Earth's resources and long-term investment in efforts to conserve its finite potentials.

Over the past few decades, the world witnessed a fevered race between two systems with each trying to outstrip the other and each claiming that it provided more welfare to those who lived under it. One of those two systems collapsed during the race, and that has led to the investigation and exposure of the large-scale environmental disaster it had produced. That collapse, which spared the world the threat of total annihilation, has brought into focus the conditions of the other camp and the process of slow destruction it has been forcing the Earth to endure. What is needed now, in the aftermath, is to search for a model of progress that takes into consideration mankind's increasing needs for growth without tipping the fragile balance of the ecosystem.

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The translation of all that has been said about a new world into tangible reality cannot be a serious or responsible undertaking unless it addresses the issue of endemic poverty in developing countries. While that problem worsens in developing countries, the surpluses of industrial countries continue to increase. The North's responsibility for its actions in the past is obvious, as is evidenced by the environmental dilemmas the Earth faces today. Therefore the North must help the South technologically and financially to avoid the repetition of past mistakes.

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In this respect, if we sincerely wish to begin implementing Agenda 21, the countries of the industrial North should announce at this session of the General Assembly their financial commitments, as agreed in Rio. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to carry out structural changes in the Global Environment Facility if it is to become more representative and democratic and thereby play a more efficient role in financing Agenda 21.

In paragraph 38.11 of Agenda 21, it is stated that, at its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly is to establish a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development, in accordance with Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations. We believe that the establishment of such a Commission will enhance international cooperation for sustainable development and that one of its priorities should be, inter alia, to monitor financial and technological inflows to developing countries. The importance of establishing this Commission now stems from the fact that its establishment will take place within the current restructuring of the United Nations in the economic sphere and, therefore, is likely to increase the momentum of the process and accelerate it. In this regard, we concur with the view of the Group of 77 that we should support the Commission with an efficient and technically qualified administrative secretariat. Moreover, we believe that the Commission should allow for the effective participation of as many governmental and non-governmental organizations as possible with a view to enhancing and enriching its work.

War and peace have a direct link with environmental matters, since war and armed conflict cause a great deal of devastation to the natural environment and obstruct sustainable development. Furthermore, prolonged foreign occupation inflicts severe damage on the environment and destroys the socio-economic structures of the occupied territory.

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We in Palestine have experienced that at first hand, over the years. Only independent nations have the advantage of being able to cope with the challenges of sustainable development, as peoples under illegal foreign occupation can do little to control, manage and preserve their environment. Therefore, we believe it is the collective responsibility of the international community to take upon itself the preservation and management of the environment of occupied territories by protecting it from the ravages of the methodical and persistent exploitation at the hands of the forces of occupation.

We are absolutely convinced that the long Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and Israel's persistent attempts to alter or create facts on the ground do not in any way affect the principle of the permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people over its natural resources.

In this respect, we believe that the international community's desire to discharge its responsibilities is reflected, among other things, in the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and, in particular, of Principle 23, which states that:

> "The environment and natural resources of peoples under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected."

The continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds, exacerbates environmental problems and obstructs the process of sustainable development. Until the Israeli occupation ends, the Palestinian people wishes, like other peoples, to benefit from the programmes of Agenda 21 and appeals to all international governmental and intergovernmental organizations to take that into account in elaborating any new programmes of assistance to the Palestinian people. In this regard, we wish to recall the Preamble of Agenda 21, which states that in the implementation of the relevant

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programmes, attention should be given to the particular circumstances facing the economies in question and that this will be carried out by the various actors according to the different situations, capacities and priorities of countries and regions in full respect of all the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The Middle East witnesses at present a multi-directional peace process that has been going on for a whole year. Among the committees in the multilateral talks in this process is one on the environment. Throughout the course of the talks last year, we had hoped that the issue of the environment would be addressed with a greater degree of earnestness and in a more reasonable manner by all parties. That, however, has not been the case, and Israeli violations continue against the environment of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds. Unfortunately, because of Israel's instransigence in the peace process, no progress has been made and the negotiations continue to be stalled.

The responsibility of the international community with regard to this matter is quite clear. It should move the peace process forward by bringing pressure to bear on those parties that are impeding it and force them to abandon their negative and obstructive position. We also reaffirm the responsibility of the United Nations vis-á-vis the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds, until a comprehensive settlement is achieved under international legality. This will always be part of the United Nations permanent responsibility vis-á-vis the question of Palestine until a lasting solution to the question in all its aspects is achieved.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.